

Do You Know How Free from ALL Law¹ You Are?

In the lesson, “Do You Know How Free from Law You Are?” we discussed that New Covenant believers are dead to the Old Covenant Law (Rom. 7:4). We showed from Scripture that the Old Covenant is obsolete (Heb. 8:13), and that the Ten Commandments were the very basis for the Old Covenant (Deut. 4:13).

The believer is not to be taught by the law, but by grace (Titus 2:11-12), and we are led by the Spirit of God, not the law (Rom. 8:14-15).

Very early in the Christian church the Gentile believers, who had never at any time been under the Old Covenant nor the Old Covenant laws, were told they had to follow the Law in order to be right with God. This is not true. Believers are NOT under any part of the Old Covenant. Our relationship with God is based on faith in Jesus Christ.

I. The Early Church Controversy about Adding the Law to Faith in Jesus

Acts 15

*And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, **“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”***

² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.⁴ And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them.

*⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, **“It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”***

⁶ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

*⁷ And when there had been **much dispute**, Peter rose up and said to them: **“Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.** ⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ **and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.** ¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ **But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.”***

¹ According to Romans 13, we are to obey civil law. This lesson is not about civil law, but rather religious law.

¹² Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles.

¹³ And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, “Men and brethren, listen to me:¹⁴ Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

¹⁶ ‘After this I will return

And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down;

I will rebuild its ruins,

And I will set it up;

¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD,

Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,

Says the LORD who does all these things.’

¹⁸ “Known to God from eternity are all His works. ¹⁹ Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ **but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.** ²¹ For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

²² Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

²³ They wrote this letter by them:

The apostles, the elders, and the brethren:

To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings.

²⁴ **Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law” –to whom we gave no such commandment–** ²⁵ it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ **For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:** ²⁹ **that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.** Farewell.

A. Notice that believing Pharisees said, “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses.” This was not a debate about circumcision only; not about keeping festivals only. It was about keeping the Law of Moses...the Old Covenant laws, all of them, including the Ten Commandments.

B. If there was ever a perfect time for the elders of the early church to clarify this issue and to tell the Gentile believers that they had to keep the law, and specifically that they

needed to keep the Ten Commandments, this was it! But they did not even mention them!

- C. Most people today do not live in a society where meats are offered to idols, so that isn't even an issue for most people. Even Paul declared in Corinthians that eating meat offered to an idol means nothing. The only reason he abstained from it was to accommodate the conscience of someone who might have seen the act as immoral.

1 Corinthians 10:23-33

All things are lawful for me², but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; 26 for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 27 If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness." 29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other.

- D. The only thing left on the list they sent to the Gentiles was to abstain from sexual immorality. This seems a reasonable request.

II. Mixing the Law into Grace

- A. Paul wrote the Galatians giving them a stern warning about preaching "another" gospel.

Galatians 1:6-9

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

- B. Paul writes of his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He then tells of how he rebuked Peter of living free from the law while the Jews were not present, and then following the law when the believing Jews came.

Galatians 2:14-21

*But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, **why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?**"¹⁵ We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,¹⁶ knowing that **a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ**, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might*

² Paul is referring to what he eats and drinks. He is not saying it is okay to murder and break the civil law.

be justified by **faith** in Christ and **not** by the works of the law; for by the works of the law **no** flesh shall be justified. ¹⁷ But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through the law **died to the law** that I might live to God.

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by **faith** in the Son of God, who loved me and

gave Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

- C. Paul equated adding the law to grace as “being made perfect by the flesh”.

Galatians 3:1-7

*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? 2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the **works of the law**, or by the **hearing of faith**? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, **are you now being made perfect by the flesh**? 4 Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, **does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?**— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” 7 Therefore know that only those who are of **faith** are sons of Abraham.*

- D. When we live under the works of the law by adding law into grace, we put ourselves under a curse because in order to be blessed and not cursed under the law, a person had to obey the entire law. Thankfully, we are justified (made righteous) by FAITH.

Galatians 3:10-14

*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in **all** things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 But that **no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.”** 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them. 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through **faith**.*

- E. **The Law's purpose was to lead us to Christ.** After we come to Christ, we no longer need the law. Paul is imploring them to NOT ADD THE LAW INTO THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST WHICH THEY RECEIVED BY FAITH.

Galatians 3:23-25

*But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 **But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.** 26 For you are all sons of God through **faith** in Christ Jesus.*

- F. **Jesus fulfilled the law for us.**

Matthew 5:17-19

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

Luke 24:44

Then He said to them, “These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.” 45 And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.

- G. **The “handwriting of requirements” (the handwritten law) was taken away, nailed to the cross.**

Colossians 2:13-14

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14 having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

- H. **When we seek to be right with God through adding the law to our faith, we become estranged from Christ. We fall from grace. Grace and law DO NO MIX!!!**

Galatians 5:1-4

*Stand fast therefore in the **liberty** by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a **yoke of bondage.** 2 Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. 3 And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. 4 You have become estranged from Christ, **you who attempt to be justified by law**; you have fallen from grace.*

1. The “yoke of bondage” here is NOT TALKING ABOUT SIN. It is clearly talking about the law. We are to stand fast in our relationship by grace through faith and not become entangled with the law.

2. When we attempt to be right with God through the law, we fall from grace. The two cannot be mixed. You are either under the law or under grace. They cannot be combined.
3. Traditionally “falling from grace” has been taught as sinning. However, the true interpretation of what it means to fall from grace is to try and be justified by law...any law. Believers are only justified by grace through faith not any law of any kind.

III. A Recipe for Failure

- A. The very reason that sin does not dominate us is because we are under grace NOT law.**

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

- B. We need to avoid being under any law because law actually strengthens sin³.**

1 Corinthians 15:56

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

- C. Paul talks about his personal experience of the law being revived in his life. He shows that the law brings death and strengthens sin.**

Romans 7:8-11

But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. ⁹I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. ¹⁰And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. ¹¹For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.

- D. When believers mix law back into grace, which Paul clearly refers as seeking to be justified by the “flesh” in Galatians, we actually increase sin in our lives and in the lives of those whom we teach. Living according to the flesh; that is, according to law, strengthens sin, and even worse, it severs us from Christ causing us to fall from grace.**

Galatians 5:16-18

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

- E. The proper way to not sin is the stay in the Spirit. In context we clearly understand that “in the Spirit” refers to justification by faith versus a combination of faith and law. The result of staying in the Spirit, not adding in the works of the flesh (the law) is having the fruits of the Spirit.**

³ What about civil laws? See Romans 13.

Galatians 5:22-26

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

- IV. We are not only free from the laws of the Old Covenant, but from any religious law.
- A. It is difficult to identify “Christian” laws because they look like good things. For example, it is commonly taught that we should read the Bible and pray every day. Those are good things, aren't they? Of course, they are! The trouble is if they become law in our lives, they will bring death. Just as the law brings death, so do all “Christian” laws.

Romans 7:10

And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death.

B. Code Words for Law

1. When people start to realize they have mixed law into faith, they discover how extensive that mixture is. “Christianity” is very good at masking law using different vocabulary. Keep this in mind: A law is anything we think we should do in order to be MORE than we already have been made in Christ. They are the activities we do that we believe will make us MORE holy, MORE righteous, MORE sanctified, MORE spiritual, and bring us CLOSER to God. Here are some common code words for law in the church today.
 - a. *Spiritual disciplines*
 - b. *Life disciplines*
 - c. *Protocol*
 - d. *Behavior Modification*
 - e. *Formula living (how to pray, how to be a good parent or spouse, etc.)*
 - f. *Behavioral Guidelines (often part of being part of a certain Christian community)*
 - g. *Goals (spiritual and personal)*
 - h. *Organization (how you spend your time)*
 - i. *Giving (how much you give and to whom)*
 - j. *Service (involvement in a local church or other ministry)*
2. Please note. There is nothing wrong with doing the things above BECAUSE we are loved by God, BECAUSE we are right with God by faith, BECAUSE He lives inside of us, and BECAUSE of all the things He accomplished in us and through us, **but it is DEATH if any of these things become a law.**
 - a. The very idea that any of these things are required is totally false.

b. It is also untrue that these things improve our relationship or standing with God.

1) We already have the presence of God living in us.

Colossians 1:26-27

The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. ²⁷ To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

2) We are already right with God.

Colossians 1:21-22

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

3. So, how are we to know if the above list is law to us or simply something we are doing BECAUSE we are loved? It is an easy test. Stop doing these things and see if you still feel justified before God.

4. Most Christians today view their standing with God or their sense of being a “good” Christian with whether or not they are keeping the standards they believe they are supposed to keep. WHENEVER we base our relationship with God on our own spiritual practices, we have fallen from grace.

Galatians 5:1-4

*Stand fast therefore in the **liberty** by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a **yoke of bondage**.² Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. ³ And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.⁴ You have become estranged from Christ, **you who attempt to be justified by law**; you have fallen from grace.*

5. When we fall from grace we will feel a sense of loss. This will manifest itself as some or all of the following:

- a. Misery instead of joy
- b. Feelings of inadequacy or thinking you can never measure up
- c. Shame
- d. Condemnation
- e. The sense that God is far not near (a sense of separation)
- f. Insecurity about God’s love for you instead of awareness of His love

- g. The sense that there is a carrot dangling in front of you that you cannot ever obtain no matter how hard you try
- h. Wanting to leave Christianity even though you still love Jesus
- i. Hunger and thirst instead of satisfaction
- j. Desperation instead of hope
- k. Unbelief instead of belief
- l. Weariness
- m. Mental or emotional confusion and conflict
- n. The sense you need to “find” God which can lead to
 - 1) Opening yourself to false religious experiences such as Christian mysticism and/or unholy manifestations
 - 2) Excessively compulsive study and service
 - i. Doing “the list” MORE
 - ii. Doing “the list” BETTER
- o. Wishing you didn’t exist or even thoughts of suicide
- p. Feeling guilty for having the above feelings when you KNOW it should be different but you just have no idea why you feel the way you do

V. Finding Your Way Back

If you are studying this lesson, and you realize you have fallen from grace, you will likely ask, “How do I find my way back?” It is as simple as coming before God and asking him to help you. Recognize that you are loved and accepted by God based on your faith in His Son. John 3:16 says that “whoever BELIEVES in Him will NOT perish but have everlasting life”. It really is that simple. If you believe in Jesus you are already righteous before God.

Set yourself free from the multiple expectations you have accumulated over the years. God just wants you to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ. He has done all the work for you. You are forgiven. You are righteous. You are holy and blameless in His sight. His presence is in you. His life is yours. He loves you. This is the gospel: glad tidings of good things from our good God! He died to give it to you. Believe and receive it, then live it!

You CANNOT improve on what Jesus did at the cross. It is insulting to even try. If we could make ourselves better than He already made us, then He died for nothing. Find a fellowship that is teaching these truths. Reject mixture of the works of the law into grace. It will take some time to filter out all the junk you might have in your belief system, but little by little, God will set you free.

Colossians 2:6-10

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. ⁸ Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰ and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

You ARE complete in Him